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# THE MUNICIPAL SPIRIT IN ENGLAND.

BY THE HON. ROBERT P. PORTER.

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AT this moment we have, in the problem of the government of London, questions which involve all England, and interest the civilized world. Municipal government in England is no longer confined to the details of water supply, street paving and cleaning, lighting and sewage, and police protection. Within a period covered by my own observations, the large provincial cities, and quite recently London itself, have become the scenes of the most daring socialistic experiments of the century. In consequence, the municipal life of the English people has assumed a new phase for the student of political economy, and one far more complicated than the examination of budgets, the study of taxation and expenditure, and a comparison of debt and valuation of property. Town life in the twentieth century will be as widely different from town life in the nineteenth century as the town life of the fifteenth century, which Mrs. Green describes so interestingly, differed from that of the present day. The stupendous change from country to town, which the present generation has witnessed in northern Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States, at first massed the population like cattle in the lower quarters of the great cities. The centralization of industry consequent upon changed methods of manufacturing made this necessary. It took time to adjust these centres of industrial energy to the new conditions, but it was inevitable in a country like England, which in a large measure abandoned agricultural interests for the more tempting fields of manufacture. In this, of course, her large cities took an important part. For a while no attention was paid to the condition of the people either in workshop, factory or home. Tempted from the dull monotony of rural life by higher wages than the

land afforded, the British working classes migrated to the large cities. Huddled together in the vilest tenements, burrowing like moles below the earth in noisome cellars, working hours without number in the fetid atmosphere of illy ventilated factories, subject to the frightful dangers of badly inspected mines, and falling easy victims to disease in consequence of bad drainage or poor water supply, the first step of the modern industrial system may have brought a shower of gold to the capitalist, but it left a sickening trail of human victims in the wake of the triumphant car of progress.

Bad as many of these cities are now in spots, and high as the death rate is in the lower quarters, the report of the Royal Commission of 1844 revealed a condition that, if allowed to continue, would have simply destroyed the efficiency of the working classes of the kingdom and seriously impaired the nation's vitality. Fortunately for England, the greed-driven manufacturers were brought up sharply by an aroused public sentiment, and legislation was begun which has led up to changes that will revolutionize town life of the twentieth century, forever explode the inhuman theory that pressure of competition is justification for degrading the standard of life of the whole community, and improve the condition and stamina of the English people.

The municipal spirit so common in the United States and in the large cities of the ancient world seems to have been almost dormant in England until the middle of the present century. Then it broke out in many directions. The condition of the working classes in the large towns was, as I have said, deplorable. Education, sanitary conditions, hours of labor, protection of life and health in occupation, open spaces for recreation, and rational amusements had received little attention from economists, whose eyes were fixed on the growing volume of Board of Trade statistics, and whose pens were active in the glorification of England's expanding manufactures and commerce. The dawn of better times came with the various factory and mining laws, the legislation in relation to sanitary matters and the artisans' dwelling-house acts, followed by the establishment of Board schools, and an awakening of the municipal spirit which has already brought about many important changes in the provinces, and which in six years has cemented the parishes of London into the greatest municipal experiment of the age.

In this short time the establishment of the London County Council has crystallized and humanized the heretofore discordant elements of the metropolis, and, as it seems to me, has done more to encourage what is best and most advanced in local life than all London's 120 charters running over 670 years, from William the Conqueror to George II., to say nothing of the innumerable acts of Parliament relating to the functions of the various boards and bodies which control the affairs of the metropolis.

Before dealing with London as we find it to-day it may be worth while to briefly note some of the changes that have taken place in the other principal cities, because there we shall find not only much of interest and permanent value in the discussion of the municipal problem, but much that will enable us to forecast the future of this interesting experiment in governing five millions of people.

The old aspect of municipal administration dealt with the paving and lighting of streets, the supply of water, the construction of sewers, in maintaining order and occasionally in the establishment of Parks. The new phase of municipal administration in its most ambitious form, aims to deal with every question that directly or indirectly affects the life of the people. Carried to the extent to which it has been in some British cities it is in fact nothing short of municipal socialism. Those who wish to study the details of this new order of things will do well to obtain a work recently published, entitled "*Municipalities at Work*," by Frederick Dolman, in which I have found much of value in relation to what the various English cities have accomplished. Another useful work on the subject has been published by Dr. Albert Shaw, of New York, who has made some interesting studies of individual English cities. The present article at the most can only touch lightly the, as yet, partially explored field of detail. A decided step in this direction would be fatal to the purpose I have in view, namely, the influence of these experiments on the social welfare of the masses of the people, for whose benefit and improvement they have been instituted.

The new school of municipal administration in England enters into the life of the people. It not only takes upon itself the unprofitable side of the local budgets, but argues very plausibly that a well-governed municipality can afford to give no privileges by which corporations may enrich themselves at the expense of the

community ; that such profits belong to the community at large or should be used to promote the general welfare.

Beginning with the municipalization of gas and water, the idea has extended to tramways, markets, baths, libraries, picture galleries, technical schools, artisans' dwellings, cricket fields, football grounds, tennis courts, gymnasia for girls as well as boys, regulation of refreshment tariffs, free chairs in the parks, free music, and last, though not least, it is proposed to invade the sacred rights of John Bung himself and municipalize the gin shops and public houses.

At Glasgow, a short time ago, I was afforded an opportunity of riding in the new and comfortable city tram cars. These cars are gaily emblazoned with the city coat of arms. The men are dressed in new and handsome uniforms, and instead of toiling from fourteen to sixteen hours per day to enrich a corporation, these men work ten hours, are paid higher wages than before, and to all appearances are treated like human beings. And yet travelling is cheap enough—one mile one cent. Instead of charging, as in London, a higher rate for long distances, working men are encouraged to seek homes out of town by a proportional reduction as the distance increases.

The municipality of Glasgow took over the tramways simply because the private company refused to agree to improve the lot of its employees. Fortunately like Liverpool and Manchester, Glasgow had wisely constructed its own tramways. They had been leased to the private company for twenty-five years, and the lease expired last year. In renewing this lease the disagreement occurred which ended in the determination of the city to carry on the business itself. The old company refused to sell its rolling stock, whereupon the municipal corporation, not to be bluffed, purchased a new and handsome outfit, lighted the cars by electricity, and is to-day carrying on the business, I hope, successfully. Meantime, the old company has transformed itself into an omnibus company and is trying to compete with the municipality. It is a pity Brooklyn was not in a position to have promptly done the same thing and ended the recent trouble.

Glasgow is also considering a plan for the extension of small bathing or washing establishments at the rear of every street of houses. It is believed from experience in this direction that such a plan would not only be self-supporting, but in time profitable.

Leeds last year took charge of its own tramways, and for much the same reason as Glasgow. The inefficiency of the service and its exactions from employees created such a widespread dissatisfaction, that the corporation bought out the company. Wages were at once increased, and hours reduced. What is the result? Loss? Not at all. An increase of half a million passengers, and a profit to the municipality. Leeds, however, has not shown the energy of Glasgow in dealing with the question of rapid transit.

Nearly all the principal cities of England, or at least those of them imbued with the new municipal spirit, have made, as it were, a specialty in some particular enterprise, and with invariable success.

Birmingham has become noted because of its great municipal improvements and the success of all its efforts in this direction. The zeal of this city not only extends to the comfort of its people, but to the encouragement of art, science and literature. More to the point, a quarter of a century of the most satisfactory work in this direction has cost the ratepayer no more than the inefficient management of old.

Manchester, among other things, supplies hydraulic power to those requiring it. The boldest scheme probably ever undertaken by a municipality was the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal. The spirit of enterprise which prompted it deserves success, though I am afraid it may prove a mistake. It is, however, the only serious mistake which I have found thus far in my inquiries. Liverpool has a tremendous fight ahead with its slums, and so, indeed, has Manchester. In furnishing municipal lectures and in bettering life and making it more attractive, Liverpool has shown some progressive spirit; though the old conservative element abounding in the great commercial city of the kingdom has hindered the progress which was practically unimpeded in the Midland centre and the manufacturing towns of the North. Glasgow, with its municipal street cars, its city lodging-houses, laundries and popular concerts, is certainly second to Birmingham; Bradford, with its satisfactory electric light system, its remodelled central part, its abolition of slums, and Leeds, with its splendid Central Library and fifty-three branch libraries, and more open space than any other city of its size, are instances of the new order of things in municipal work that must be studied separately to be fully understood and appreciated.

You cannot tabulate degrees of comfort nor work out exhibits showing the effect of all these changes upon human beings. General observation alone helps in such matters and if my general observation is of any value, I have noticed a tremendous change in all these cities since I first visited them nearly fifteen years ago. I was sent abroad in 1880 by a department of the United States government to look into the financial condition of English cities, to measure their expenditure, gauge their receipts, summarize their debts and estimate their burden of taxation. Even in those days a municipal budget was a dry sort of table to those of us who revelled in figures. The new conception of municipal government had not then made the headway it has to-day. The relation to social progress was not as close then as now.

The condition of the population of these large towns has undoubtedly improved. This is confirmed both by observation and statistics. A satisfactory decline in the death rate has followed all enterprises looking to the better housing of the poor, the increased area of parks and open spaces, the improvement of sewage and of water supply. Early closing and reduced hours of work, have elevated labor and improved the community. Baths, libraries, reading-rooms, art galleries, technical schools, museums, have all helped to make life better worth living in the large cities. There can be but one opinion on this side of the picture.

So far as England is concerned, the only limit on this sort of work would be, I suppose, the capacity of the assessment roll, and the amount the ratepayer is willing to pay. Democratic government we have here; to some extent the government of rich communities by poor men. In England, however, as a rule, a more responsible class of men interest themselves in municipal affairs, than with us. At the same time, outside of a few large cities, I believe nearly as satisfactory results as we find in England can be obtained in well-governed American cities. As between the contract system and the system of municipal authorities employing labor direct, I am in favor of the latter. There is less chance of jobbery, of a low grade of work, and of squeezing the man who gets the least and works the hardest.

The real, vital, debatable question, which the growth of the municipal idea or municipal spirit is forcing to the front, is: How far can municipalities go in this direction without undermining the whole fabric of free competition?

In thus becoming its own builder, its own engineer, its own manufacturer, does a municipality enter too much into direct competition with private industries? Does it not undertake work which individuals are equally able to perform? If this be so, is there not danger of those of us who applaud the Tramway enterprise of Glasgow, the Real Estate scheme of Birmingham, the Municipal Tenements of Liverpool, the Hydraulic Power and Ship Canal venture of Manchester, the Abolition of Slums in Bradford, and the grand municipal achievement of Leeds, finding some day or other enterprises not in the present catalogue taken up by municipalities. In other words, to what extent is it safe to trust municipalities in this direction?

John Morley has said: "You may safely entrust to local bodies powers which would be mischievous and dangerous in the hands of the central government." On this theory, undoubtedly true in the main, England is for the moment basing her municipal legislation, and the cities and towns of the country are rapidly becoming important factors in the adjustment of wages and hours of labor. In all advanced cities, and especially cities which have abolished contractors and employ labor direct, a regular scale of wages corresponding to the highest rate is in force. The hours of labor vary from fifty-three to sixty per week. In some of the cities, sweepers, men employed in gas works, etc., pay in a small part of their earnings, which is supplemented by the city, and at sixty-five they are pensioned. If they die before this age the money goes to their representatives.

In matters relating to labor, perhaps the London County Council is the most conspicuous example, if not for what it has already accomplished, certainly for the present and future extent of its operations.

The theatre of this experiment is an area difficult to define because of its enormous size and the complexity of the jurisdiction affecting it. The term London is at present so indefinite as to cover at least ten different areas.\* The population of these several areas ranges from 37,705 for the City of London to 5,633,806, for the total area within the Metropolitan Police District. The administrative County of London, over which the County Council has jurisdiction in practically nearly all matters relating to the

\* The corporation of the city, the County Council, the police, the magistracy, poor-law guardians, and asylum board, the central criminal court, the school board, the Register General, the water company, the gas company, the post-office.



general welfare of the people, except criminal matters and police, contains about five millions of people. The cost of governing this area, representing one-fifth of one per cent. of the area of England and Wales, is something like \$60,000,000 per annum. This does not include either gas or water which are supplied at an annual additional cost to the inhabitants of \$25,000,000 and \$10,000,000 respectively. For the definite charitable organizations exclusive of hospitals, schools, and endowments of all kinds, about \$12,500,000 are annually spent.

According to *Burdett's Annual* the amount spent on the principal hospitals is \$4,000,000. There is no means of ascertaining this exactly, but Mr. Burdett informed me that the yearly income of the greater charities which have their headquarters in London amounts to upwards of \$35,000,000, equal to the total revenues of New York city. Of this stupendous sum, London probably receives at least half, possibly \$20,000,000.

London's annual budget, as nearly as I am able to estimate it, for taking care of between five and six millions of people is as follows :

Cost of Lighting .....	\$26,000,000
Water supply .....	10,000,000
Police .....	9,500,000
Schools .....	10,000,000
Streets .....	10,000,000
Paupers .....	12,500,000
Private charities and hospitals of all kinds .....	20,000,000
Health .....	3,500,000
Fire protection .....	650,000
Interest on debt .....	5,000,000
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>\$107,150,000</b>

As an off-set for this enormous expenditure we have an income that when compared with the rest of England is simply gigantic. The assessed rental value of houses for London is upwards of \$180,000,000, nearly 30 per cent. of the total for all England; net profits of trades or professions, \$265,000,000, or over 41 per cent. In the schedules relating to particular properties and public companies, London represents nearly 60 per cent. or a total of \$445,000,000 and in salaries and fees nearly 70 per cent., or \$115,000,000, a total annual income exceeding 1,000 millions of dollars.

Perhaps these astounding totals representing incomes may give American readers some idea of the volume of earnings that pour annually into the coffers of this great center of the world's wealth, trade and commerce.

The items of expense given in the table above only represent the more striking expenditures. It would be safe to estimate the total cost in round figures, say at 110 millions of dollars. Nearly a quarter of this goes for furnishing artificial light: another quarter for pauperism and charities. London's gas bill represents nearly one-third the amount expended for gas by the United Kingdom. Nor is the item of pauperism and charities large when we bear in mind the appalling fact that twenty-seven out of every hundred deaths in this aggregation of humanity occur in public institutions. Every fourth person you meet on the crowded, bustling thoroughfares of Living London dies a pauper, an inmate of a hospital or of a lunatic asylum.

The active industrial classes, those engaged in trades and industries, exceed a million. To furnish these and other professional and commercial classes with efficient means of locomotion from their homes to the various centres of work, is a problem hardly taken up by the municipality of London, much less solved, as is the case in large provincial cities. It is managed in an unsatisfactory manner, by a patchwork of ingeniously disagreeable methods, consisting of freezing, lumbering omnibuses, smoking, choking underground railways and tramway cars which it takes an hour's journey in some other conveyance to find. On the other hand, the cab system is almost perfect, and the charges reasonable. The proportions of this service may be realized from the fact that the total number of hackney and stage carriages at the present time is nearly 15,000.

In the ordinary course of events the London County Council, which by the way has come to stay, has some stupendous municipal problems to solve without considerable extension of the functions of municipal government—I mean without at present plunging too deeply into the labor question, the municipal ownership of the land for the common good, and the new vista of possibilities of municipal action which the more advanced advocates propose. One would think that the gas and water supply involving \$36,000,000 per annum, and the improvements of transit, afford a field for the ambitions of the ablest municipal statesmen. And there are some very able and distinguished men in the London County Council, men who represent every phase of thought in politics. At Spring Gardens extremes meet. Howard of Norfolk, England's premier duke, may measure

swords with plain John Burns, M. P. and labor leader. The late Prime Minister, Earl Rosebery, will always remember with pride and satisfaction that he assisted at the birth of this most democratic of all public governing bodies in England. As chairman of the London County Council his first two annual addresses will some day become of great historical importance in the discussion of the municipal tendencies of the times. Statesmen of the first class, scientists whose names are known the world over, economists, men of letters, jurists, politicians, business men, labor representatives, are for the moment taking an active interest in administering to the comfort and welfare of the London five millions. The experiment is watched with even more curiosity and interest by foreigners who have a front view than by those at home behind the scenes.

Of the public spirit, ability and honesty of these gentlemen no one who has studied the six years' work of the London County Council can have a doubt.

The adoption of what is known as the "fair wages clause" by the London County Council and many other English municipalities is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, though the growing tendency of the Council to take upon itself work of all descriptions is used with effect by the Moderates to alarm timid taxpayers and large landlords.

The best defence of this system, and of the "fair wages clause" in all contracts may be found in an article by Sidney Webb in the January *Contemporary*. Mr. Webb is undoubtedly the ablest Progressive leader in the Council. A politician will find it difficult to answer such an argument as the following from Mr. Webb's article :

"It may be economically permissible under the present organization of industry for a private employer to pay wages upon which, as he perfectly well knows, it is impossible for the worker to maintain himself or herself in efficiency. But when a Board of Poor Law Guardians finds itself rescuing from starvation, out of the Poor Rate, women actually employed by one of its own contractors to make up workhouse clothing, at wages insufficient to keep body and soul together, even the most rigorous economist would admit that something was wrong.

"The London County Council, responsible as it is for the health of the people of London, declines to use its position as an

employer deliberately to degrade that health by paying wages obviously and flagrantly insufficient for maintenance, even if competition drives down rates to that pitch.

“What economist, now that the Wages Fund is dead and buried, will venture to declare this action uneconomic.”

Shocking as it would sound to the free trade ears of Mr. Webb, this is simply a municipal form of protection. Mr. Webb would undoubtedly say that the council's policy in these matters was not the abolition of competition, but the shifting of its plane from mere cheapness to that of “industrial efficiency.”

By this method it is claimed they close up to the contractor the less legitimate means of making profit by the aid of “pauper labor.” We do no more than this when we ask the English manufacturer to pay a duty on his goods; goods made perhaps in the same way as Mr. Webb describes. In other words, the London County Council has established, beyond doubt, the doctrine that it is immoral to take advantage of any cheapness that is got by merely beating down the standard of life of particular sections of the wage-earner. Mr. Webb says:

“And just as the factory acts have won their way to economic approval, not merely on humanitarian grounds, but as positively conducive to individual efficiency, so, too, it may confidently be predicted, will the now widely adopted fair wages clauses.”

As a protectionist I am willing to concede that industrial efficiency is undoubtedly promoted by fair wages, that cheap labor, whether in a large city or in the country districts, means a degraded population; but I fail to see that the mischief or danger in this sort of legislation, if mischief or danger there be, is incurred by placing it in the hands of the State, whereby the labor of a whole nation is elevated, instead of permitting the cities and towns to carry it on in spots. The strongest part of the protection armor has always seemed to me what may be called the political argument; that is, the conditions of the country (the United States if you please) must be protected against the lower conditions or standard of wages and of living in European countries, where the environments of the working classes are so different. Whatever views may be held on these questions of political economy it will be seen that municipal government in England is spreading its functions in dangerous economic ground, and that the battle at this moment, for control of Spring Gardens involves

questions of far greater import to England and the world at large, than a penny a month increase in local taxes, or the administration of the local budget of London.

This contest does not, as some suppose, involve the existence of the County Council, or the so-called unification of London. These questions are no longer debatable. London stands to-day one, and indivisible. As Mr. Asquith recently said, "London is not a fortuitous aggregation of a set of adjacent communities," though from a recent article by the last Lord Mayor of London in this REVIEW one would imagine that to be the case.

Mr. Leonard Courtney, surely a wise and judicious man and chairman of the Royal Commission, which recently reported on this subject, informed me that no serious objection exists in either political party to the ultimate unification of London.

Mr. Courtney is a Liberal-Unionist not fully in sympathy with the progressive majority of the London County Council. "London," he said, "will never be divided into separate municipalities—of that you may feel assured—not if the Conservative party should return to power. The only question is the division of what may be termed powers relating to the common life of the people and those which may wisely be treated locally. In these changes the corporation of London will be treated with fairness and with a full appreciation of its wealth, traditions and civic importance." Mr. Courtney is so entirely right in his estimate of English public opinion on the question, that this phase of the London municipal problem does not seem to me worth discussing in a general way.

Lord Salisbury, who poses as the friend of the old city, is barren so far as a positive policy is concerned. London will never again be split up into topographical expressions. It has realized the advantages of true civic patriotism, and will continue to increase the central power in all things that affect the common interest and raise the level of its people. The only real question, therefore, as I have endeavored to explain, is how far this policy of improving the condition of the people may be carried without encountering the danger already pointed out.

ROBERT P. PORTER.